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Getting Grants *for Women*

**How to prepare a proposal
to get funding for your project**



Ontario
Women's
Directorate



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Table of Contents

Introduction 2

1. Finding possible funders 2

2. Getting started 2

3. Writing a proposal 3

4. Preparing a budget 5

5. Planning a project evaluation 8

6. Putting it all together 8

7. Proposal Writer's Checklist 10

Glossary 11



Introduction

People often tell us that they find the idea of writing a proposal a bit overwhelming. There seems to be so much to do and they are not sure where to start. We wrote this booklet to help you when you have a project idea and need financial support from funders to make it happen.

This booklet will give you some ideas about how to prepare a project proposal. You will find out what to put in a proposal and a project budget. And, we have included a checklist to guide you through the proposal writing process.

We hope that this booklet is useful. If you still have questions or are unsure about something after reading it, please call us. We would be pleased to help you. You can reach the Ontario Women's Directorate's Grants office at (416) 314-0383. We accept collect calls.

1. Finding possible funders

Many different organizations and government departments have funds available for community projects. You will find a list of some funders in our booklet, *Finding a funder for your project*.

You may have to call several funders to find the ones that are most likely to have money for your project idea. Every funder has priority activities it would like to fund and sets its own funding rules. Begin by identifying the funders who are most likely to be interested in your project. Community groups may have some helpful advice for you about funders and funds.

Funders want to hear from people with good project ideas. Give them a call.

2. Getting started

There are a number of things to do before you start writing your proposal.

- **Discuss the project idea with members of your group.** Do you all share a clear idea of what you want to do during the project?

**Who has
funding
available
for projects?**

**How do I
start?**

Why do you want to do it? What effect do you hope the project will have? How many people will work on the project? What will their jobs be? Will you need to hire staff for the project? How long will the project take? How will you know if the project worked out? What will your group do when the project is over?

- **Talk to other groups and organizations in your community about your project.** Do they think it is a good idea? Will they work with you on it or give you services or supplies to help make the project happen? Will they write you a letter saying they support the project? *A few key letters of support are an excellent addition to your proposal.*
- **Decide which funder(s) you are going to ask for money.** Read their materials carefully so that you know exactly what information they want from you. Check their deadlines and their special requirements. Some funders may ask you to write a short letter about your project. They will let you know if they want you to prepare a complete proposal. Some funders want you to fill out an application form instead of or in addition to a proposal. Some funders may want a proposal to include extra information such as copies of your financial statements for the last two years or proof of your group's incorporation.
- **Plan ahead.** Funders sometimes take three or four months to decide on funding, so your proposal needs to be ready several months before you want the project to start.

3. Writing a proposal

Before you write, take some time to think about the funder. What are the funder's priorities? How does your idea fit in? Why should this funder be especially interested in your project? For example, if a funder's priorities are rural women's health issues, make sure you highlight the rural and health components of your project even if your project covers other issues too (and don't bother applying to the fund if your project has nothing at all to do with rural women's health).

What are
the funder's
priorities?

Most funders ask a number of people to read over proposals and then come to a meeting to select the projects that will get funding. This means that your proposal will be read by several people, some of whom may not be familiar with your group or with the need your project is trying to meet.

The information in a proposal

Unless the funder gives you an outline to follow, you can organize your proposal any way you want. Usually, funders want proposals to include information on six topics.

1. Your group

Give the funder some information about your group.

- How long have you been working together?
- Why did your group get started?
- Why is your group able to meet this need?

2. The need for your project

Tell the funder about the need that your project is trying to meet.

- How do you know the need exists?
- Why is your group, in particular, aware of this need?
- Why are you able to do something about it?

3. Your project objectives

Explain what effect you hope your project will have.

- What are the project's main activities going to be?
- After the project is over, what will be different?
- After the project is over, will any of the project activities continue?

4. The day-to-day project activities

Describe what you will be doing during the project.

- What will happen during the project?
- Why are these activities important?
- Who will be working on the project?
- What will they do?

5. The budget

Give details on the amount of money you will need for the project.

- How much will the project cost?
- How much money do you think you will get from other funders and other sources?
- How much money do you need from this funder?

**How much
will the
project
cost?**

6. Evaluation

Explain how you will know if your project had the effect you thought it would have.

- How will you know if something changed because of your project?
- How will you report to the funder on the results of the project?

Your proposal is your chance to convince a funder that your project is a good idea and that your group can make the project work. Use clear, everyday language to describe what you want to do. Show the funder why they should support your project.

4. Preparing a budget

Your budget is a very important part of your proposal. It shows a funder that you have thought about the details of the project and have a good idea of how much it will cost.

Budgets have two parts – expenses and revenue.

Expenses

Your budget should list all the money you will need to run your project. Project expenses might include the cost of:

- staff salaries, for example for a project coordinator, researcher, trainer, outreach worker, administrator or support staff
- benefits for staff, for example contributions to unemployment insurance and health insurance (an amount between 8 and 15% of the salaries is usually reasonable)
- hiring people to do specific tasks like bookkeeping and the final audit of the project accounts

**What are
project
expenses?**

- renting office space and office equipment
- office supplies
- postage
- telephone services
- bank charges
- travel expenses
- insurance
- providing access for people with disabilities
- child care costs if you are organizing a community event
- hall rental
- printing
- advertising and promotion
- translation
- conference speakers' fees
- doing a project evaluation.

Sometimes it is hard to know ahead of time exactly what something will cost. Your budget should give a funder a realistic idea of how much money the project will need, but you do not have to figure out everything to the penny. You can put estimates in your proposal.

Include volunteer work and free services

Your project expenses should include the contribution of volunteers and the value of donated items. Although volunteers are working for free, you can estimate the amount you would have had to pay to get the work done and include this amount as a project expense. You should also show how much it would have cost you to buy or lease items other organizations are prepared to give the project free of charge. For example, your municipality may be letting you use office space without charging you rent. Or, a service club may be letting you use their photocopier for free.

Volunteer work and free services are in-kind contributions. By including them as project expenses, you are giving a funder a better idea of the real cost of your project. You are also showing how the community supports your project.

When you include volunteer work and free services in the expenses part of your budget, you must put the same amounts in the revenue side of your budget.

Revenue

The revenue, or income, part of your budget shows all the money that you expect your project will bring in. Here are some examples of the revenue a project might have:

- Money you will make charging admission to an event your project will organize.
- Money you will make selling a pamphlet or other material your project will produce.
- The contribution of volunteers to the project.
- Other in-kind contributions, like free office space or photocopying.
- Money you expect to receive from other funders.

Unless your project is quite small (under \$ 10,000), very few funders will give you all the money you need for your project. Most funders prefer to share the costs of your project with others. They want to know which other funders you are asking for money. You can list all the funders you are contacting, noting which ones have agreed to give you funding and which ones have not yet decided on your proposal.

Funders like to see that you have tried to get money for your project in every way you can and that other people are also contributing to it.

Funding exceptions

Some funders will not pay for certain types of expenses. For example, the Ontario Women's Directorate will not pay for capital expenses like the cost of buying a computer or other office equipment. (We will pay the cost of leasing this equipment.) Other funders may not pay for someone to speak at a conference, although they may be prepared to pay the speaker's travel expenses.

Check the funder's guidelines or talk to the funder to find out exactly what kinds of expenses the funder will pay.

**What is
considered
revenue?**

The bottom line

Your budget should show exactly how much money you are asking the funder to contribute to your project.

5. Planning a project evaluation

Most funders want you to evaluate your project. An evaluation is an objective assessment of what went on during the project and a report on how the project worked out. For a large project, the funder may ask you to participate in a formal evaluation organized by people outside your organization. For a smaller project, you could use one of several ways to evaluate your project. For example:

- Ask people who took part in your project's activities to come to a meeting after the project is over to talk about what happened. What worked well? What could have been done better? What has changed as a result of the project? Take notes on what they say and write this up in a report.
- Call some of the people who received a copy of the pamphlet or other material you prepared and ask them about it. Do they have any suggestions for you? Is the pamphlet useful? Put their answers together in a report.
- Distribute a questionnaire at the conference you organized, asking participants what was good and bad about the conference and what they learned by being there.

You can talk to the funder about what kind of evaluation they would like to have for your kind of project.

6. Putting it all together

Once you have written the proposal, it is a good idea to ask someone from outside your group to read it over. This is a way of testing your proposal with someone unfamiliar with your project idea who can read about it in the same way a funder will. This person can let you know if anything is unclear and suggest changes to improve the proposal.

**How do I
evaluate
the project?**

Write a cover letter to send in with your proposal. The letter should tell the funder a bit about your group and your project idea. Explain why you think your project idea will interest them. The letter should make the funder eager to read your proposal. Include the name of your organization, the address at which you want to receive letters, the name of the contact person for the project and phone number(s) for the contact person.

Make sure you get your proposal to the funder by the deadline.

A few days after you have sent in your proposal, call the funder to check that they have received it. Ask if they have any questions or if they would like any other information. Keep in touch with the funder during the next few weeks to make sure that nothing is missing from your proposal and to let them know that you are counting on them.

The best advice

Call the funder if you are unsure about anything – what types of projects they fund, what types of expenses they cover or exactly what they want you to include in a proposal.

Although a funder cannot tell you for sure if your project will be funded until they see your proposal, they can give you an idea of what to put in it. If a funder says, “We’ll be looking for...”, make sure you include that information in your proposal.

Talking to funders is a good idea.



Where can I get advice?

7. Proposal Writer's Checklist

- When is the funder's deadline for the proposal? _____
- What does the funder want us to send in?
 - ☐ cover letter
 - ☐ application form
 - ☐ proposal
 - ☐ incorporation documents
 - ☐ list of Board members
 - ☐ a record of the Board of Director's decisions concerning our project
 - ☐ anything else _____
- How does the funder say this information is to be put together?
- Does our proposal include information about
 - ☐ our group
 - ☐ the need for our project
 - ☐ our project objectives
 - ☐ the day-to-day project activities
 - ☐ the budget
 - ☐ evaluation
- Do we want to include anything extra with our proposal?
 - ☐ letters of support for the project from community organizations
 - ☐ newspaper clippings about our organization
 - ☐ letters of congratulations for projects we ran before
- Have we checked our proposal for errors and made sure that the figures in the budget add up?
- How many copies of the proposal package does the funder want? _____
- Does our proposal include the name of our organization, our address, the name of the contact person for the project and all relevant telephone numbers?

We hope that this booklet will help you to prepare your project proposal. If you have any questions, please give us a call.

Grants Office
Ontario Women's Directorate
(416) 314-0383
We accept collect calls.

Glossary

capital expenses The cost of buying equipment or making permanent changes, such as renovating your group's work space. Many funders will not give you money to cover the cost of capital expenses.

core funding Money to support a group's main, or core, activities. Core funding pays for a group's regular, every day expenses. Only a few funders offer core funding.

criteria The standards by which funders judge proposals. Before funders read proposals, they usually set up the criteria, or standards, that they will use to decide which proposals should get funding. Criteria might be the innovative nature of the project, the effect the project is likely to have and the participation of members of the priority group in the planning and work of the project.

expenses The amount of money you expect to have to pay to make your project happen. Expenses might include salaries, rent for office space and what you would have had to pay to get equipment or services individuals or groups may give to your project for free. (see in-kind contributions)

in-kind contributions Individuals or groups may give your project their time or the use of their equipment or space, or something else, instead of giving your project money. These contributions have a value, even if your project does not have to pay for them. You should include the value of in-kind contributions in your budget under "revenue" and under "expenses." Your budget bottom line will be the same but funders will have a better idea of the actual cost of your project and the support you have for it.

revenue The amount of money you expect that your project will get from all sources, including funders, publication sales, conference fees or in-kind contributions.

Here are the definitions for some words you might come across when you read a funder's material.

speaker's honoraria The small amount of money a speaker is paid to speak at a conference. This amount is usually much less than the speaker would get paid speaking to a for-profit organization.

start-up funds Money to help get a group going. Funders usually only provide start-up funds for a few months or years. After that, your group will have to find other sources of funding.

target group The type of group to which a funder plans to give its money. Most funders want to use their money to support the activities of certain groups of people or to help solve specific problems in society. Some funders use the term "priority group" instead of "target group."

